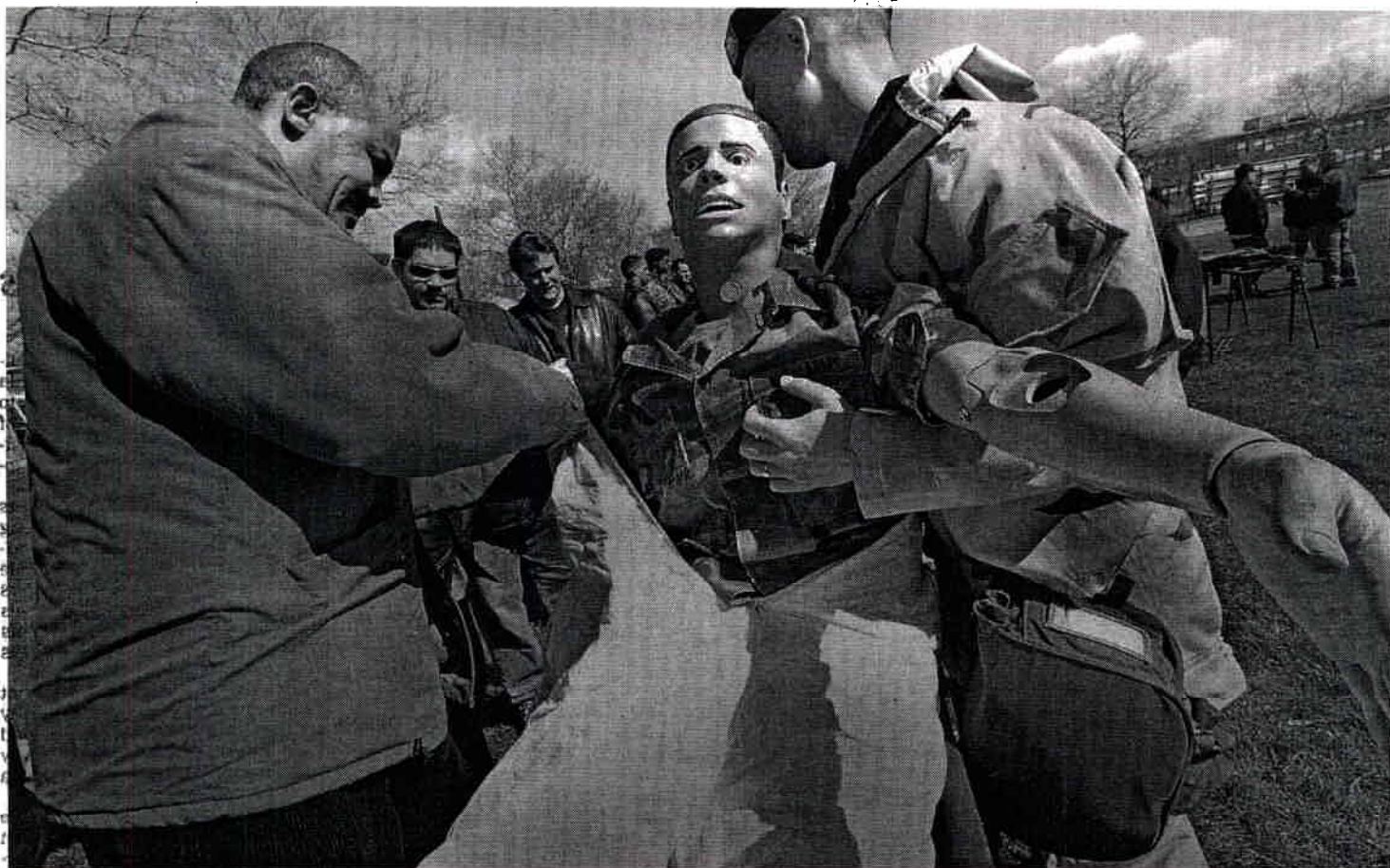


A NATION CHALLENGED: Preparing and Investigating

Librado Romero/The New York Times

Patient decontamination, above, was among topics at a workshop on chemical, biological and other kinds of terrorism at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn.

ANTITERRORISM TRAINING

Two Days of Learning What to Do, and What Not to Do

By DAVID W. CHEN

When Anna Simeone, a forensic chemist with the New York Police Department, arrived at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn on Thursday for a two-day workshop on bioterrorism, she expected that the exercise might be a bit academic, the equivalent, perhaps, of "an interesting seminar in grad school."

Instead, Ms. Simeone felt enlightened, humbled and awed by the experience of getting instruction from Army medical experts, participating in a simulated nuclear fallout exercise and figuring out how to decontaminate a mannequin that had just been exposed to nerve or mustard gas.

"Everything was so interesting; it was like information overload," Ms. Simeone said yesterday after watching an Army expert in chemical agents explain treatment methods. "It's just a little scary to think that this could actually happen, right here," she said.

Ms. Simeone could have just as easily been speaking for the 160 or so people from nearly three dozen city, state and federal agencies, as well as hospitals and community groups, who were trying to learn how to better respond to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism.

The workshop was the Army's first comprehensive bioterrorism seminar for civilians, officials said. And the session was the first gathering since Sept. 11 for such a large and diverse collection of local agencies and groups for the purpose of preparing for bioterrorism.

The Army had actually been planning a much more modest version of this workshop since July, mainly to recruit health care professionals. But after Sept. 11, the scope of the workshop changed and expanded, largely at the behest of Councilman Martin J. Golden, who represents Bay Ridge, where Fort Hamilton is situated.

By Thursday, just about every major agency with even a tangential connection to security or health care in New York was represented. Natu-

rally, the police and fire departments were present. So, too, were the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Coast Guard and the Kings County District Attorney's office.

Even Community School District 20 in Bay Ridge was represented.

"Wherever there is a health danger I have to make sure the superintendent and the district are notified," said Trudy Adduci, director of math, science and health for the school district.

The training session began Thursday with classroom presentations on current domestic and global threats, an overview of the 1995 chemical

Mark Epstein and other officials from the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Sciences Branch at the Army's Academy of Health Services in San Antonio offered a demonstration of the latest in chemical-warfare protective suits, skin decontamination kits and radiological devices.

At another site, Maj. Joe Gresenz used three mannequins, lying on gurneys, to explain how one should — and should not — treat a person who has been contaminated with either nerve or mustard gas. He talked, for instance, about the proper way of removing the patient's clothing. He also explained how one would use either water or a bleach solution to treat exposed skin areas.

And at another site, Maj. Steve Cima led a nuclear fallout exercise in which participants were asked to fan out across the baseball field with simulated radiation-detection devices, and determine not just the level of radiation level, but also how much time they could safely treat an exposed patient.

Two minutes? Two hours? Timing was everything.

"When we train our new officers, we're training them for the battlefield," Major Cima said. "And on the battlefield, all the soldiers have training and equipment, and it's much easier to manage those hazards. But in a civilian environment, they don't."

Not everything, of course, was novel to the participants. After all, the Police Department's Emergency Services Unit and the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, to just cite two examples, frequently have similar training sessions. In fact, the most recent multi-agency operations exercise organized by the Office of Emergency Management had been planned for Sept. 12.

But even the most experienced emergency workers said that there was much to be learned in two days of coursework.

Dr. Vincent Eletto, an emergency physician at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, said that he would recommend that the hospital use soft brushes, and not its current supply of bristly brushes, in prepar-

A workshop in Brooklyn for police and city workers.

attack on the Tokyo subway system and a discussion of the potential tools of domestic bioterrorism, among other topics.

What made the biggest impression among some participants, though, was the discussion about nuclear threats, in which they offered advice (subways or basements can be excellent fallout shelters) and dispelled misperceptions (do not pack your family and your worldly possessions into a car and flee the scene because you'll only clog highways and other passages for emergency vehicles).

"It's scary to think that the P.D. has to learn this stuff, because you never thought you had to learn it before," said Sgt. Chris Batignani of the New York Police Department. "But even a quick intro is better than never seeing it before it happens. That way, you know the basics."

There was more classroom instruction yesterday, but a big dollop of practical exercises as well, that played out on a baseball field in the shadows of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

At one location, Sgt. First Class

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